United Nations A/64/578 E/2010/3

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 December 2009

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-fourth session
Agenda item 58
Operational activities for development

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2010
New York, 28 June to 23 July 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council

Letter dated 3 December 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As you are aware, the Government of the Republic of Rwanda hosted an intergovernmental meeting for the representatives of the Governments of the eight Delivering as One programme pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam), as well as representatives of the Governments of countries that have indicated voluntary adoption of the Delivering as One approach (Benin, Bhutan, the Comoros, Kiribati, Malawi and Papua New Guinea), in Kigali from 19 to 21 October 2009. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Governments of the programme country pilots to hold further exchanges on the experiences and lessons learned from their Delivering as One initiative since the seminar of the programme pilot countries on Delivering as One held in Maputo in 2008, and to exchange views on how to move the process forward while advancing the implementation of the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 62/208.

I wish to seize this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for the valuable support provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Development Group Office, the United Nations Evaluation Group and the United Nations country team in Rwanda in organizing and facilitating the event.

The text of the statement of outcome and way forward of the Kigali meeting, setting forth the findings of experiences of the programme pilot countries in the Delivering as One approach, the launching of the country-led evaluation and

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recommendations on the way forward is transmitted herewith for your consideration (see annex).

The meeting stressed, inter alia, that the launching of the Delivering as One initiative in participating countries took place at the specific request of their national Governments in the hope that the role and contribution of the United Nations system with respect to national development will become more coherent, effective and relevant and better support the Governments in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The participants noted the findings and recommendations of the seminar of the programme pilot countries held in Maputo in 2008 and concluded that much progress has been achieved since then.

The participants emphasized that the Delivering as One approach was better than the fragmented United Nations development system that previously existed at the country level. They agreed that in the pilot countries there was no going back to doing business as it had been done prior to the Delivering as One initiative.

Among the general findings, the meeting reaffirmed that the Delivering as One approach had provided benefits for achieving better development results through increased national leadership and ownership in the development partnership with the United Nations system, in line with the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 62/208. Programme pilot countries and countries voluntarily adopting the Delivering as One approach have increased access to a range of United Nations system mandates and resources, including those of specialized agencies and non-resident United Nations organizations, and national Governments determine which of those best respond to national needs and priorities.

The institutional framework for steering the process and the coordinating role of the Governments have been strengthened, which brought about greater coherence in United Nations support for addressing national priorities and has allowed the United Nations to become a more effective partner.

The lack of predictability and timeliness of funding, the lack of harmonization and simplification of business practices, high transaction costs, the low level of use of national operational capacities and the slow progress of the co-location of United Nations organizations were found to be among the major remaining constraints on the full implementation and acceleration of the Delivering as One initiative.

The meeting welcomed the initiative of seven of the eight programme pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam) to conduct country-led evaluations of their Delivering as One initiatives in compliance with the triennial comprehensive policy review resolution. The evaluation will be formative and will assess both the processes and results of the Delivering as One initiative. The participants agreed that, while the evaluations were country-specific, a set of common parameters should be considered in all of them and institutional arrangements have been agreed on to ensure the independence, quality and credibility of the evaluations.

The meeting provided a set of recommendations for accelerating the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/208 while reaffirming that there was no going back to doing business as it had been done prior to the Delivering as

One initiative and that the process should be taken forward in a strengthened manner with a view to addressing the challenges.

I should be grateful if you could arrange to have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 58 of the agenda, and of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 3 (a).

(*Signed*) Eugène-Richard **Gasana**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 3 December 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement of outcome and way forward adopted at the Intergovernmental Meeting of the programme country pilots on Delivering as One, held in Kigali, 19-21 October 2009

Introduction

Representatives of the Governments of the eight Delivering as One programme pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam) as well as representatives of the Governments of countries that have indicated voluntary adoption of the Delivering as One approach (Benin, Bhutan, the Comoros, Kiribati, Malawi and Papua New Guinea) met in Kigali, Rwanda, from 19 to 21 October 2009.

The participants in the meeting thank the Government of Rwanda for hosting the meeting, in particular His Excellency the Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda, Bernard Makuza, for his inspiring words of welcome. The role of overall chair of the meeting, assumed by His Excellency the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, James Musoni, is gratefully acknowledged.

The participants thank the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Asha Rose Migiro, for her active participation and contribution, the Chair of the United Nations Development Group for her statement and the co-Chairs of the informal consultations of the General Assembly on system-wide coherence held at its sixty-second and sixty-third sessions for their support for the Delivering as One initiative. The participants also thank the representatives of the Governments of Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for their participation as observers and for their support.

Special thanks are due also to the staff of the United Nations for organizing and facilitating the event. The role of facilitator assumed by Mr. Moustapha Soumaré is gratefully acknowledged.

Introductory comments

All participants in the meeting, including those from countries that have indicated voluntary adoption of the Delivering as One approach, take note of the findings and recommendations of the seminar held in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008 and conclude that much progress has been achieved since then. Participants stress that the launching of Delivering as One in their countries took place at the express request of their national Governments. Expectations are high that the role and contribution of the United Nations system with respect to national development will become more coherent, effective and relevant and better support the Governments in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Participants acknowledge that while there was no blueprint for Delivering as One, the pioneering efforts of the pilot countries have been crystallized into an approach under the principle of "no one size fits all", which has resulted in a certain degree of diversity of experiences and lessons learned in the different programme

pilot countries, but at the same time has shown a number of common elements across the countries.

Delivering as One fits in with the implementation of the Paris Declaration at the country level with its objective of better coordination and coherence.

Programme pilot countries and countries voluntarily adopting the Delivering as One approach have increased access to a wider range of United Nations system mandates and resources, including those of specialized agencies and non-resident United Nations organizations. National Governments determine which resident and non-resident agencies best respond to national needs and priorities.

Participants stress that the United Nations organizations are called upon to provide support to capacity development in programme countries, including normative and policy advice in achieving poverty eradication, sustained economic growth and sustainable development, which requires a coherent and coordinated approach by the United Nations development system.

Participants stress the importance of South-South cooperation as an emerging cooperation modality in the context of Delivering as One. Participants further recognize the importance of the United Nations system in promoting and supporting such cooperation for capacity development, the transfer of technology and know-how as well as the sharing of best practices.

The reforms undertaken have given renewed government leadership to United Nations programmes, brought about greater coherence in United Nations support for addressing national priorities, and has allowed the United Nations to become a more effective partner. However, while commendable progress has been made at the country level, reform must now be pursued with equal vigour at the global level. Agency headquarters, executive boards, the General Assembly and Member States must all continue to support the reform process and work to realize change where it is required.

General findings

The Governments of the eight programme country pilots draw the following lessons learned from their experiences since the adoption of the Delivering as One approach:

The Delivering as One approach has provided benefits for achieving better development results through increased national leadership and ownership in the development partnership with the United Nations system. Experience thus far has confirmed that this approach is better than the fragmented United Nations development system that existed at the country level prior to the adoption of this approach. Participants agreed that in the pilot countries there is no going back to doing business in the manner prior to the Delivering as One initiative. The momentum should be maintained, and the process should be taken forward in a strengthened manner addressing the challenges.

National ownership and leadership

National ownership and leadership in the development partnership with the United Nations system has increased through the Delivering as One process. In all pilot countries, the role and contribution of the United Nations system is better

integrated in national development processes, and the United Nations system has become more responsive to national needs and priorities. The strategic role of the United Nations and the contribution that the United Nations development system can make to the achievement of national development priorities are clearer than before, though further improvement is required.

The pilot countries, particularly in the implementation phase, are increasingly working with subnational levels of government as well as civil society, giving them a strong sense of involvement and ownership of the development process and results.

Institutional frameworks for steering the process have been strengthened, including in providing actual oversight of the implementation of the "one programme", and outlining programme priorities for the coming years.

"One programme" and "one budgetary framework"

Delivering as One is ensuring coherence, strategic focus and simplified programming at the country level, ensuring aid effectiveness. A single, common country planning document has proved critical in the realization of these aims and contributes to the effectiveness of development results. Participants call for the effective implementation of operative paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 63/311 on system-wide coherence.[a]

The One UN programme and its budgetary framework provide the Governments with an overall view on what the United Nations system is doing in the countries and where it is spending funds. It shows in a transparent and holistic manner the work of the United Nations in the country and makes it easier for Governments to lead and have country ownership of the strategic direction of the programme and guide the work of the United Nations. Although more mutual efforts are needed in terms of the use of national financial and procurement systems, the coordination role of the Governments has been strengthened vis-à-vis the United Nations family.

The adoption of the "one programme" approach, including mechanisms for joint programming, has allowed countries to have better access to the range of mandates and resources of all organizations of the United Nations system, including those of specialized agencies and non-resident organizations.

The contribution of agencies is not determined by residency status, but, rather, by the contribution that they can make to the development priorities. Increasingly, non-resident agencies have contributed their specialized expertise in joint programming and policy dialogue, which has allowed the United Nations development system to draw upon the normative strength of the United Nations system.

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[a] Operative paragraph 7 reads: "*Also requests* the Secretary-General, in consultation with the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group, to propose to the General Assembly, at its sixty-fourth session, modalities for the submission and approval of common country programmes on a voluntary basis, bearing in mind the importance of national ownership and effective intergovernmental oversight of the development process".

There has been greater focus on issues such as gender, human rights, HIV/AIDS, the environment, employment and decent work, and disaster preparedness in country programming.

Coordination in programme implementation has improved with the creation of programme coordination mechanisms within the United Nations country teams.

Country-level United Nations staff capacity assessments have highlighted the need for the United Nations development system to provide a better mix between, on the one hand, programme management and implementation support, and, on the other, technical and policy advice as suited to the country situation.

Coordination with donors has improved, with donors increasingly operating as a cohesive group in their interaction with the United Nations country team.

The "one budgetary framework/one fund" has been critical in promoting coherence and improved division of labour among United Nations system agencies. However, there is still room for improvement, including on greater predictability and timeliness of funding at the country level, and the non-earmarking of contributions within the "one fund". The "one United Nations fund" mechanism has facilitated the improved strategic focus of the United Nations and brought better management for results, as well as enhancing compliance with the Paris Declaration principles.

Participants of the pilot countries note with concern that there are still significant funding gaps in the implementation of One UN programmes. They call upon donors and other countries in a position to do so to provide additional, predictable and multi-year contributions.

Participants note the risk that the development of programmes is driven by the availability of earmarked resources at the country level rather than by national needs and priorities and the specific comparative advantage of the United Nations system vis-à-vis other development partners at the country level. They call upon the donors to provide unearmarked funding and ensure that a minimum critical mass is made available for strategic programming to align the One UN programme with the national priorities.

While the "one budgetary framework/one fund" has the potential to enhance the transparency of and accountability for financial flows of the United Nations system, it is observed that information provided by the United Nations system in this regard does not in all cases meet the budget information needs of programme country pilots. United Nations budget cycles should, to the greatest possible extent, be aligned with national budget cycles.

Participants in the programme country pilots welcome modalities that make use of and strengthen national implementation systems and practices, especially in the areas of procurement and financial management.

In middle-income countries, programmatic needs should determine the funding of the One programme through country funds and improved access to the expanded Delivering as One funding window through mechanisms taking into account the needs of the middle-income countries for non-earmarked predictable resources for policy advice and capacity development. However, participants also observe that the use of national systems and expertise by the United Nations system is still at a low level.

Participants welcome and appreciate the initiatives taken by Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in establishing the expanded Delivering as One funding window for unearmarked funding of Delivering as One and their strong commitment to predictable and long-term funding. Participants call upon other donors to join this mechanism.

One leader and one voice

Programme country pilots recognize the strengthened role of the resident coordinator within the United Nations country team and mechanisms adopted for the United Nations system to speak with "one voice". However, pilot countries call for the resident coordinator to be provided with a level of authority matching the responsibilities and accountabilities placed on her/him. Participants also stress that the empowered resident coordinator would continue to work within the framework of national ownership and leadership of United Nations development assistance.

Participants also recognize that the effectiveness of the operational activities of the United Nations system in general and the Delivering as One approach in particular are contingent both on a well-coordinated United Nations country team whose members have sufficient delegated authority from their headquarters and on a well-coordinated government.

"One office" and transaction costs and savings

The United Nations system should operationally deliver as one.

While recognizing the distinct specificity of each country, pilot countries and countries voluntarily adopting the Delivering as One approach stress the importance of "one house" as a means not only of reducing transaction costs, but also, more importantly, to ensure greater synergies among United Nations teams.

Participants in the programme country pilots note that there has been slow progress in the co-location of United Nations organizations. It is noted that the cost of common premises should, where necessary, be borne by additional funding and not be at the expense of programme funding.

Progress has been made in finding solutions in areas of common services, common procurement at the country level and information and communications systems, which is being made available to other countries.

Participants appreciate the introduction of a single results report for the "one programme" and call on United Nations organizations and their governing bodies to simplify reporting requirements by substituting the single results report for individual organization reporting. They also recommend harmonized and simplified monitoring and evaluation systems with a view to using national systems.

The United Nations system is requested to ensure that United Nations staff competencies, including those of the resident coordinator and other resident and non-resident staff, are at the appropriate level to respond to national capacity needs and priorities.

While reaffirming that the central aim of Delivering as One is to achieve better development results, participants also recognize the importance of reducing the transaction costs in terms of resources, time and procedures.

The United Nations system should identify ways and means to ensure that savings resulting from cost reductions in operational activities accrue to development programmes in the same countries.

The United Nations system is requested to further clarify, standardize and harmonize the concepts, practices and cost classifications related to transaction cost and cost recovery, so that changes in transaction costs in Delivering as One programme pilot countries can be measured and reported.

The United Nations system is requested to further simplify and harmonize financial and administrative rules and regulations as well as human resource policies that would allow for more flexibility in countries and better alignment with national systems.

Country-led evaluations

Participants welcome the initiative of seven of the eight programme pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam) to conduct country-led evaluations of their Delivering as One initiatives in compliance with the triennial comprehensive policy review resolution and to share lessons learned among themselves and with countries that have indicated voluntary adoption of the Delivering as One approach as well as with other countries. Pakistan, being the biggest in terms of the One UN programme, the implementation of which started only after February 2009, will opt for the country-led evaluation at a later date to be communicated.

Participants emphasize that the evaluations should be truly country-led and respect the principles of independence, credibility and ownership.

Participants note with appreciation the technical support provided by the United Nations Evaluation Group, notably through the evaluability assessment of programme country pilots and the framework terms of reference, which are useful in developing country-specific terms of reference.

Participants welcome the methodological study to measure transaction costs to be conducted by Uruguay. Participants call for support for this initiative, whose findings and lessons learned will be shared with the other Delivering as One countries.

Participants agree that, while being country-specific, a set of common parameters should be considered in all the evaluations, namely, the objectives of the evaluations are to assess the contribution of the Delivering as One initiative to the national development priorities; the evaluations will assess four core evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of Delivering as One); and the evaluation will cover the time period since the Delivering as One initiative started in the country.

Participants agree that the evaluation will be formative and will assess both the processes and results of the Delivering as One initiative in its five pillars, including strategic intent and progress towards the outcome areas of the Delivering as One programme; will evaluate compliance with United Nations normative frameworks and cross-cutting issues and their concrete translation in the Delivering as One initiative; and will be based on evaluation questions that are specific and rooted in the national context and that embody the concerns of all stakeholders.

Participants agree on the institutional arrangements to ensure the independence, quality and credibility of the evaluations. These will include: (i) an evaluation management group at the country level chaired by the Government and composed of representatives from the Government, the United Nations and eminent national experts; the decision on the composition will be made by the Government; (ii) an independent evaluation team, recruited by the evaluation management group, that will have the relevant substantive expertise to assess the different areas of Delivering as One; and (iii) a quality assurance panel set up by the United Nations Evaluation Group, which will provide written comments on the terms of reference, the inception report, the draft and the final reports.

Participants agree that the final evaluation reports, once they have been validated with stakeholders and quality-assured by the panel, will be released to the public together with the written comments of the quality assurance panel and the management response prepared by the Government and the United Nations.

Link between country-led evaluations and the independent evaluation of lessons learned from Delivering as One

Participants welcome the provisions in the recent resolution on system-wide coherence (General Assembly resolution 63/311) that the independent evaluation should be based on the principles of national ownership and leadership, be conducted in the context of system-wide norms and standards, and be based on an inclusive, transparent, objective and independent approach.

Participants recognize that the independence, credibility and quality of the country-led evaluations will determine their usefulness for the independent evaluation of lessons learned requested in the triennial comprehensive policy review and system-wide coherence resolutions.

Participants request the General Assembly to organize the independent evaluation in such a manner that national ownership and leadership by programme country pilots is fully respected in the evaluation process.

The way forward

To accelerate the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/208 (triennial comprehensive policy review 2007) and specifically to ensure the success of the Delivering as One initiative, the participants in the meeting, including from the countries voluntarily adopting the Delivering as One approach:

- Reaffirm that there is no going back to doing business as it was done prior to the Delivering as One initiative. The momentum should be maintained, and the process should be taken forward in a strengthened manner addressing the challenges
- Underscore that the Delivering as One approach should continue to be guided by the principle of national ownership and leadership and that national Governments have the primary responsibility for their countries' development and for coordinating all types of external assistance, including that provided by multilateral organizations, in order to effectively integrate such assistance into their development processes

- Call upon agency headquarters, governing bodies, the General Assembly and Member States to continue to support the reform process and work to realize change where it is required

- Call upon donors to support Governments of pilot countries and countries voluntarily adopting the approach in sustaining efforts to mobilize timely, predictable, unearmarked and multi-year financial support for the Delivering as One initiative through the country funds

- Welcome the announcement by the Government of Viet Nam to host a high-level intergovernmental meeting on Delivering as One in Hanoi, Viet Nam, the date of which will be communicated at a later stage

- Agree that all country-led evaluations will be completed by 1 July 2010 as an input to the intergovernmental meeting on Delivering as One to be held in Hanoi.